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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: INAUGURATION OF AFGHAN PARLIAMENT

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: The inauguration ceremonies for Afghanistans first Parliament in over 30 years began shortly after 10 a.m. on the cold and cloudy morning of 19 December. The city was under strict security, with most roads and even pedestrian traffic strictly controlled. Both the upper and lower houses of the new Parliament, together with the Cabinet and foreign representatives, assembled in the Wolesi Jirga Plenary Hall at the recently renovated Parliament building. Darulaman Palace - the future home of the Parliament is still under reconstruction, but the present temporary quarters gave a feeling of closeness and camaraderie to the assembly. The Parliamentarians, men and women who personified all facets of modern Afghan history - from ex-communists to mujaheddin fighters to old aristocrats to former Taleban and many ex-refugees who had fled Afghanistan to Iran, Pakistan and the West were all joined together in their new roles as representatives of the Afghan people. The mood was dignified but excited, befitting the solemn occasion and the presence of so much political history and past conflict. The American delegation included Vice President and Mrs. Cheney, the Ambassador and LTG Karl Eikenberry. A major portion of the ceremony was taken by President Karzais State-of- the-Union Address to the new Assembly. END SUMMARY.

A DIGNIFIED OPENING

¶12. (U) The ceremonies inaugurating the new Parliament on December 19 were opened by Dr. Aziz Lordin, Provisional Secretary General of the National Assembly, who welcomed the

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assembly and thanked all those who had contributed towards the successful inauguration. He was followed by Qazi Ramin, Provisional Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House), and ex-King Zahir Shah, whose welcoming remarks were also very brief. President Karzai was then called to administer the oath of office to both houses, first in Pashtu and then in Dari.

KARZAI'S LENGTHY SPEECH

¶13. (U) In a one-hour speech to the assembly which was reminiscent of a state of the union address, Karzai touched on a wide range of topics. He began by noting that the convening of Parliament marked the completion of the process of establishing the government of Afghanistan. He assured the assembly that he and the government were committed to the law of the land. He vowed to put an end to foreign intervention in Afghanistan, to fight against terrorism, poppy cultivation and government corruption, and to overcome the problem of poverty. He said that none of this would be possible without the assistance of friendly foreign countries. When the Interim Administration was first established, the government had been in shambles and the treasury was empty. The new government had tried to implement the Bonn Agreement as well as possible, but the country depended completely on international assistance.

¶14. (U) Karzai reminded the assembly that the constitution was the chief law of the land, and said that all other laws and decrees should be referred to the Parliament. The success seen thus far had shown the commitment by the Afghan people to rebuilding their nation. Disarmament had been crucial while the new army and police forces were being built, and the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process helped the general security of the country and provided jobs for those who laid down their weapons. The police and the army were being rebuilt slowly but surely. Government leadership and administration had improved. In the past there had been a lack of schools and universities, but this situation had improved to the point where there were 10 functioning universities in the country. Millions of students both male and female were busy at their studies. Before the establishment of the Interim Administration, women had had no rights, but now they could be leaders. There were now five television stations and many radio stations broadcasting in the country. The President stressed that creation of a modern, developed economy was a government priority. Foreign investors had been afraid to come to Afghanistan in the past, he said, but now there was foreign investment and the economy was growing year by year. Since last year, for example, the economy had grown by 13 percent. Many roads are being built,

and many towns are now being linked to each other. He mentioned that a survey to construct new power plants was in process, and 13,000 villages have benefited from the National Solidarity Program. Four years ago, Afghanistan did not have a reliable currency and Afghans had to deal with foreign currencies. The new Afghan currency was a crucial element in the economy, and had proven to be stable. Land has been distributed to 25,000 families throughout Afghanistan, and, he said, Afghanistan belonged to the Afghans once again.

¶15. (U) Karzai declared that the governments biggest step was to bring Afghanistan out of isolation and to have it recognized by the international community. It now had a position of dignity in the world community. He thanked Pakistan for receiving Afghan refugees in the past, and said Afghanistan had much in common with Pakistan, including their common fight against terrorism. Both countries were committed not to interfere in each others affairs. Afghanistan owed thanks to Iran as well, a country which also assisted Afghan refugees and has also helped rebuild Afghanistan.

¶16. (U) The President thanked the United States for its strategic partnership with Afghanistan, which he said saved the country from terrorism and brought it peace. The US and Afghanistan were committed to economic development and the fight against terrorism. Afghanistans relations with Europe and Japan were very good, and they had assisted and supported Afghanistan on many occasions. Strategic partnerships with the UK, NATO and Europe were very important. He said that India was a friend to the Afghans, had assisted with USD 550 million in rebuilding costs and had provided an opportunity for Afghan students to continue their studies with Indian government scholarships. China had been very effective in the reconstruction process. Karzai said that the people of China were the strongest power in Asia, and having good relations with such an important country was crucial. He referred to Afghanistans long relationship with Middle Eastern countries and with Turkey, and thanked them as well for their efforts in the reconstruction process. Finally, he noted that the Russian Federation should play an important role in rebuilding Afghanistan.

¶17. (U) Karzai declared that the future road was a long one, and that everyone must work together. The Parliamentarians role was a key one. Sacrifices were required to resolve the countrys problems. Success had not yet been achieved, and much remained to be done. Historic monuments had to be preserved. Mosques and cultural institutions had to be built. Illegal narcotics production had to be prevented. The National Museum had to be rebuilt. Political parties had to be strengthened.

¶18. (U) The fight against terrorism was a difficult challenge, and could only be successful if Afghanistan had foreign assistance. Terrorism in Afghanistan had a foreign root, and that root had to be eradicated.

¶19. (U) He said that young Afghans were being victimized by the drug trade, and that the profits from this drug trade fed terrorism. Claiming that terrorists used drug money in order to survive, Karzai asked that everyone work together in order to eradicate this phenomenon, so that foreign countries would not hold the president, the father of the nation and the Parliamentarians culpable for illegal narcotics.

¶10. (U) The President admitted that there were people who misused their official positions and who were corrupt, saying that fighting against corruption was another priority and his government failed to meet expectations. The help of Parliament would be crucial in this area. He reminded the assembly that administrative reform needed time and was not easy to accomplish. All three branches of the government had to work together to achieve all these goals. Creating employment and fighting poverty were also priorities. Foreign assistance had not created sufficient job opportunities, and the government had to pave the way for private investors to come to Afghanistan. This would only happen when they felt themselves secure and safe.

¶11. (U) Karzai thanked the international community for its assistance, but said that this help should be channeled through government institutions. He added that attention to the agricultural and livestock sectors in the country was necessary, and that creation of job opportunities for returning refugees and resolving their problems were important. He said the government had plans to improve the conditions for the nomads (kuchis) of the country, that the education system should be modernized and a new curriculum implemented, and that vocational schools should be created.

¶12. (U) Noting that internal security was an integral part of the countrys defense, he said that the governments policy of strengthening peace (the GOAs reconciliation program for ex-Taleban and HiG fighters) should pave the way for those who wanted to return to live a normal life. He noted that that Afghans had experienced the brutal intervention of

foreign countries which had resulted in the destruction of Afghanistan and its army. The country's present policy, he claimed, was based on non-intervention in other countries' affairs, and was tied to unbreakable loyalty, strategic cooperation with the West, and loyalty to the countries of the region. The London Conference will be a vital next step following the Bonn Agreement.

¶13. (U) Karzai ended on an emotional note which resonated through the assembly. He said that his wish was to have a strong Afghanistan. Afghans would - and must - show the world that Afghanistan was a strong country, and that it would remain strong. Afghans would show the world that they were able and committed to helping Afghanistan get back on its feet.

COMMENT

¶14. (U) Although the President's speech was received in solemn silence almost until the very end, his final sentences were delivered with such emotion that his eyes began to mist, and many in the assembled crowd could be seen wiping their own eyes. The applause was large.

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